

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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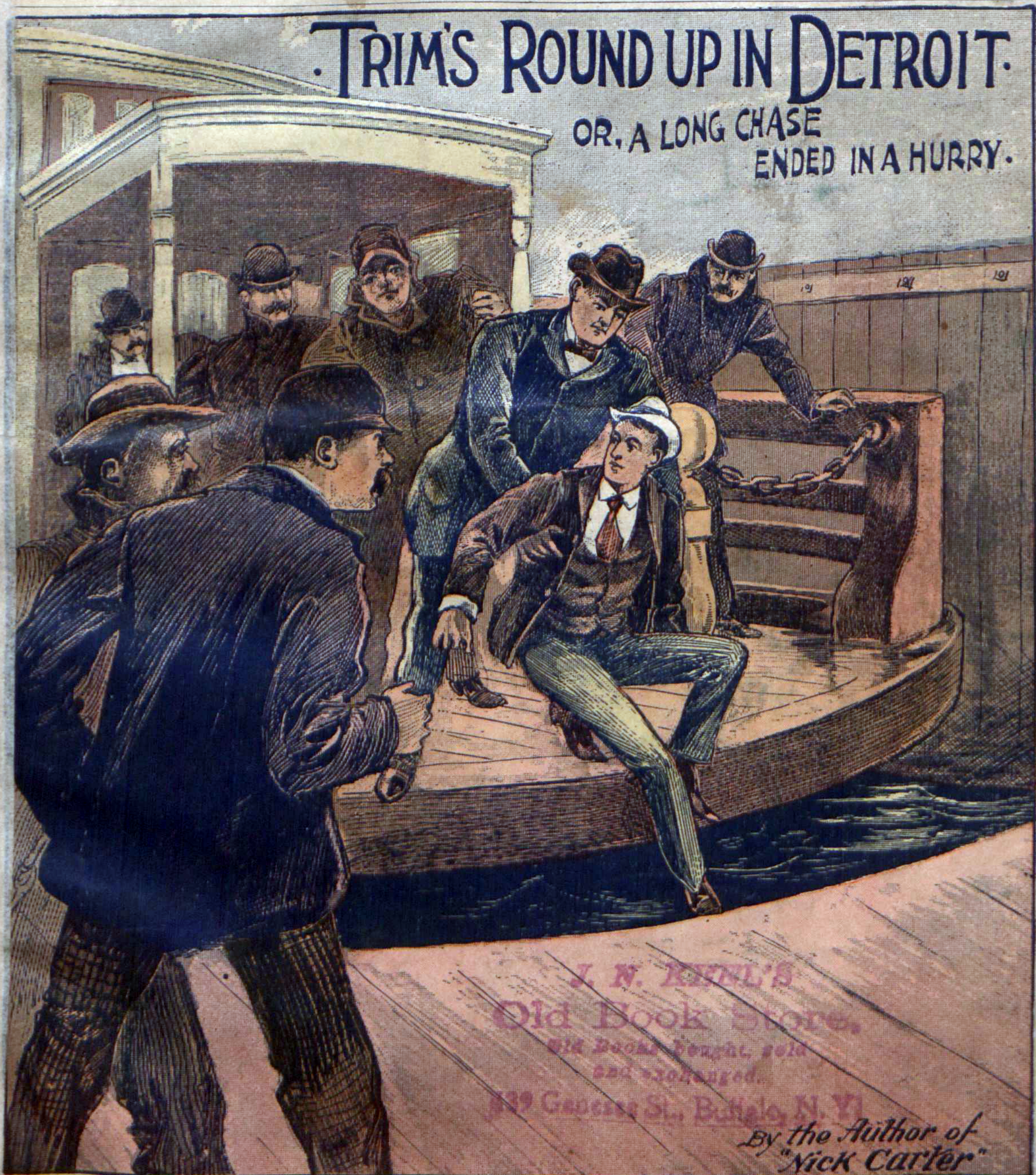
NEW YORK.

29 Rose St., N. Y.

5 Cents.

TRIM'S ROUND UP IN DETROIT.

OR, A LONG CHASE
ENDED IN A HURRY.



J. N. KIRK'S
Old Book Store.

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and exchanged.

239 Madison St., Buffalo, N. Y.

By the Author of
"Nick Carter"

NICK PULLED TRIM TO SAFETY JUST IN TIME.

J. N. KEEL'S
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132 Genesee St., Buffalo, N. Y.

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TRIM'S ROUND UP IN DETROIT

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By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR'S TEMPER.

"Get out of my way, you insolent puppy!"

"I'm not a puppy and I won't have any man talk——"

"Don't answer me——"

"I'll have that bill settled——"

"You'd insult me again, would you?"

"It's no insult to ask a man to pay his debts!"

"I won't have it, you blackguard! I won't be accosted in a public square in this fashion, and if you don't get out of my way instantly you'll suffer for it."

It was in front of the famous Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. It was early in the forenoon and the square before the ancient building was lively with people.

Many of them, attracted by the sounds of angry voices, stopped in their walk to look curiously at the quarrelers.

Among those who turned aside with amused interest was Trim Carter, the young detective.

When the quarrel broke out he had been standing within the doorway of the

Alamo itself, engaged in a silent debate as to what course to take next in a long and important investigation that was occupying his attention.

He was so deeply interested in his own thoughts that the quarrel had been in progress for several seconds and had grown quite hot before he was fully aware of what was taking place.

When at last he did awake from his debate he saw a few paces from him a well-built and stocky, but not tall man, who looked like a prosperous laborer.

It proved later that he was a blacksmith; and at the first sight of him Trim's shrewd eyes noticed the compact form of his shoulders, and the lad reflected that such a customer would be a hard one to down in a wrestle or a fight.

This man was half facing toward Trim and therefore attracted his attention first.

The other man, whose face at the moment Trim could not see, was very tall and apparently as muscular comparatively as the first.

Although his trousers were tucked into the tops of high boots, as it is quite the custom among the rougher population of

the Southwest, it was evident at a glance that he was not a cowboy or a miner.

His coat was well and fashionably made and he wore a short high hat that no ordinary cowboy would have thought of putting on.

It was this latter person who was using the most abusive language, apparently because he had been asked to pay a bill.

He carried a riding whip in his right hand and as he spoke he shook it in the air as if he would bring it down upon the face or shoulders of the man with whom he was disputing.

"It would be fun," thought Trim, "if those two should quit swapping words and get into a real scrap. I bet the fur would fly and it wouldn't surprise me if the smaller chap should prove to be pretty nearly a match for his tall nob's."

Trim's boyish wish to see a "scrap" was quickly granted. The smaller of the two men stubbornly held his ground.

He stood with folded arms glaring defiantly into the angry face of the other. At the last words of the tall man, the blacksmith responded:

"You've got a violent temper, Dr. Walker, but you've also got a head on you, and you know too much to try anything rash with me."

"I do, do I?" retorted the man addressed as Dr. Walker, flourishing his whip in the air.

"Get out of my way, then, or you'll be sorry you tempted my rashness!"

"I'll make you suffer for it if you lay a hand on me," declared the blacksmith. "I'm not an ignorant Greaser to be beaten to death by a madman without——"

"Once more, you contemptible whelp, will you stand aside?"

"Once more, Dr. Walker, will you pay what you owe me?"

Again the doctor raised his whip in the air, but instead of flourishing it or striking the blacksmith, he dropped it to the ground and with a sudden movement, caught the blacksmith up in his arms.

For a second or two there was a furious struggle; the blacksmith resisted with all his force trying to get the use of his muscular arms to break the grip that the doctor had upon him.

He had been raised completely from the ground and having been caught with his

arms folded it was not possible for him to release them so that he could strike a blow.

The doctor shook him this way and that much as a cat worries a mouse; then the blacksmith got one foot upon the ground and bracing hard against it pushed with all his might against his antagonist.

The doctor had caught him around the back, and now, instead of shaking him, was pressing him in such a way that there seemed to be real danger that the blacksmith's spine would be broken.

The next second the blacksmith managed to get his right arm partly free, and he brought his fist against the doctor's chin.

It was a short blow, and therefore not very effective, but it was enough so as to bring a grunt of wrath from the doctor and to cause him to change his tactics.

He gave up trying to break the blacksmith's back and stooping slightly, changed the position of his arms so as to catch the blacksmith up again from the ground. Then, just for an instant, he held him thus while he gathered all his strength, and the next thing that happened was that the blacksmith was thrown clear over the doctor's head.

The blacksmith tried vainly to catch at the doctor's clothing as he went.

He did not succeed and nothing broke his fall. He came down head and shoulders first upon the hard pavement and with a convulsive shudder rolled over and lay still.

The doctor picked up his hat which had fallen off in the fight, found his whip and strode away without a word or a look at his defeated antagonist.

At this sudden and unexpected ending of the affair several persons, Trim included, ran hastily up.

Trim was surprised to observe that nobody attempted to stop the doctor. On the contrary, they took pains to keep out of his way.

"If this was any of my business," thought Trim, indignantly, "I believe I'd face that rascally giant myself and see if the little argument of a revolver might not bring him to reason."

It was not Trim's business. He had other matters to look after and for the moment the condition of the defeated blacksmith demanded his attention.

Trim knelt over him and made a hasty examination.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked one of the spectators who came up.

"Has that ruffian killed him?" asked another.

Trim made no reply, but continued his examination. Every movement he made showed that he understood his work and the others, probably thinking that he was a doctor, watched him silently and waited for his report.

At last the young detective looked up and remarked:

"This is serious business, gentlemen."

"He isn't dead, is he?"

"No, and I don't think that he will die, that is, not right away, but I'm afraid his skull is fractured."

This answer caused an exclamation of horror from the listeners and several of them turned toward the retreating figure of Dr. Walker.

The latter was at that moment making his way out of the plaza.

"I should think," remarked Trim, rather sarcastically, "that some of you men who live here might run after that ruffian and have him arrested!"

"Nobody wants any unnecessary trouble with Dr. Walker," responded one of the onlookers.

"Huh!" retorted Trim, sneeringly, "then go and find a physician to attend to this man."

This had already been done by one of the more thoughtful in the crowd and just after Trim spoke a physician hurried up.

He too made a hasty examination and came to much the same conclusion that Trim had.

"He's badly hurt," the doctor said, "but how badly we can't tell yet. It's just possible that he may recover in an hour or two and be as well as ever, and it is also possible that he may never come to his proper senses again."

Arrangements were made at once to take the injured blacksmith to a hospital and while this was going on Trim heard some information about Dr. Walker.

"He lives on a ranch," a man told him, "some miles to the west of the city and is a very unpopular and dangerous character."

"If he is let alone no one need have any trouble with him, but cross his temper and he's a perfect beast."

"I could see that," Trim responded; "but why isn't he kept in order if he's dangerous?"

"Ah, well," was the reply, "nobody hereabout is looking for any more trouble than he already has, and up to this time the doctor hasn't done anything that called for much interference."

"Brown, the blacksmith here, must have been very hard pressed for money or he never would have asked the old fiend to pay his bill."

"I thought," said Trim, "that I heard the blacksmith say something about a Greaser who was beaten to death?"

"Yes, there was something in that. It is generally understood that the doctor assaulted one of his Mexican employees and that the man died from his injuries, but he was a Greaser."

"He had no friends and so nothing came of it. There have been other times when the doctor has had rather rough quarrels with people and a year ago or so he was hauled up in police court where he was fined for disorderly conduct."

"Since then he has seldom been in the city."

By this time the blacksmith was being lifted into an ambulance and just then, to everybody's surprise, Dr. Walker came rapidly up.

Trim saw that his face was sunburned and deeply wrinkled and that he looked as savage as a human being could. He appeared to be about fifty years old.

The spectators stood aside as he approached and looked at him wondering.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, abruptly, "I lost my temper just now, and I'm not saying that I'm sorry for it, but if this ignorant and stupid fool has suffered from my anger, I shall regret it."

"I know you people don't like me, and I don't care a ——— for that, but I'm not the brute you take me for."

"If this man is seriously injured I want him to be well cared for and——"

Here he approached the ambulance and seemed to recognize the doctor in charge of it.

"Ah!" he continued, "I see that there is expert medical attention here. There

is no need then that I should make an examination."

"Do so, if it will satisfy you any better, Dr. Walker," responded the physician coolly.

"No, your judgment in the matter would be as well as mine. All I have to say is, give the stupid fool every chance possible to recover, and if anything is wanted of me you'll know where to find me."

Having said this, he turned about and strode away again.

"Strange man," muttered a gentleman who was standing near Trim.

At the same moment the ambulance started away and the crowd gradually dispersed.

Trim went on to the Adams House, where he was stopping, and on the way his thoughts were divided between the problem that had brought him to San Antonio and the strange conduct of Dr. Walker.

He was trying to give up thinking of the doctor and pay attention wholly to his own affair, but it was hard to drive the doctor out of his mind, and as things happened he was destined to keep that strange man in his thoughts for some time.

Within an hour he had learned a great deal more about Dr. Walker than was known by any of the residents of San Antonio.

CHAPTER II.

TRIM HEARS OF A MYSTERIOUS DEATH.

When Trim entered the hotel a bell boy stepped up to him at once to inform him that a lady was waiting to see him.

"A lady!" exclaimed Trim in surprise. "Who is she?"

"That's more than I know," responded the boy with a grin. "She didn't give me no card, but she's waiting for you in the parlor."

Trim, who had arrived in San Antonio within twenty-four hours without knowing a single person, wondered who it could possibly be that had found him out and what could be the business that brought her to him.

When he entered the parlor a young

woman arose from a chair at the further end and came quickly toward him.

She halted half way and seemed to hesitate whether she should speak.

"Were you inquiring for me?" asked Trim, wondering still who she was, for her heavy veil concealed her features.

"I want to see Mr. Trimble Carter," she answered in a low voice.

"That is my name," he responded. "What is—"

"Oh, Mr. Carter!" she exclaimed in great agitation. "Save me! save me!"

She took a step forward and wrung her hands piteously.

Trim glanced about the room. They were there alone and he could see nothing therefore in the situation to cause her alarm.

"Pray calm yourself," he said gently, "I shall certainly be glad to do anything that I can to assist you."

"Ah!" she responded, with a great effort to keep from crying, "it is a relief to hear such words."

She was evidently so much distressed that Trim said nothing for a moment in order to give her time to recover. Then he led the lady back to the window where she had been sitting and suggested that she take a chair and tell him plainly just what was the matter.

"I wish to do so," she answered, "but it is so hard to know where to begin and what I have to tell is so painful to me that I dread to speak of it, although my fear is so great that my life will be in danger if I don't speak."

"Well," said Trim, "let me suggest a beginning."

"Suppose you tell me first who you are and then how in the world you happened to know anything about me or know that I could be found here in San Antonio."

"I'll take it for granted that you have come to me because I'm a detective."

"Yes," she responded eagerly, "I am in dreadful need of a detective's services and I have heard so much about you that my great fear now is that you will not have time or interest to take hold of the matter that concerns me."

"You need not fear for my interest," responded Trim guardedly. "As to the time we shall see. Let me have an an-

swer to my questions, please, and then we'll get at your story."

For a moment the young woman sat silent and then she drew aside her veil, and Trim saw the most beautiful face that he had ever looked upon.

It was tear-stained and sad, but it was nevertheless such a face as would have attracted anybody, boy or man, and her eyes looked at his so appealingly that he instantly resolved that he would undertake to help her even if he had to abandon for a while the investigation that had brought him to San Antonio.

"My name is Edith Walker," she began.

"Ay!" exclaimed Trim suddenly; "what was that?"

"My name——" she said again.

"Oh, yes," said Trim; "go on, please."

The moment she mentioned the name Walker it struck him that with all her beauty there was nevertheless somehow a suggestion in her face that reminded him of the savage countenance of the brute who had had the fight with the blacksmith in front of the Alamo.

"How strange it would be," he thought, "if this girl should be in danger from that very man, and yet it would not be strange either, for anybody who has anything to do with him must be in trouble."

"No, that would not be the strange part of it, but I can't imagine yet how she has happened to come to me."

"I think that answers one of your questions," she continued quietly.

"I live on a ranch some distance from San Antonio and came in early this morning for the purpose of finding you."

"That makes me all the more curious," said Trim, "to know how it is that you learned of my presence here and how you learned even that there was any such person as me in the world."

"It came about in this way," she answered.

"A good many months ago there was a detective here from New York who did some work not only in San Antonio, but in the country lying to the south.

"Among other things he saved the life of a little girl whom I am very fond of and whose family are among the very few

friends who I have. Their name is Thompson——"

"Ah!" interrupted Trim, beginning to see a light, "and the name of the detective was Patsy, wasn't it?"

"I believe he was usually called Patsy by his intimate friends," responded Miss Walker with a faint smile; "his other name is Murphy."

"Intimate friend or not," exclaimed Trim in delight, "he is Patsy to everybody. And so you got acquainted with him, did you?"

"Oh, no!" answered Miss Walker quickly; "I never even saw him, but of course the Thompsons told me all about him and I learned to admire him very, very much. So when I felt that my present troubles were getting into such a terrible state that something must be done, when in fact I believed that my very life was in danger, I wished over and over again that I could get Mr. Murphy or Patsy, as you call him, to help me.

"I didn't dare to mention the matter to the Thompsons; in fact I saw them very little, but to make a short story of it I learned Patsy's address and wrote him a letter.

"I could not attempt in the letter to give him more than a very faint notion of my trouble, but I begged him if he could in any way do so to help me.

"I sent the letter hardly expecting a reply, for I have no means to pay detective services and my one faint hope was that Patsy might have business in Texas which would enable him to see me and at least give me a little advice.

"I received a reply to my letter so promptly that I am sure he must have answered by the return mail.

"He told me that his own work would make it impossible for him to come to this part of the country at this time, but that Trimble Carter was in the West and would quite likely turn up at San Antonio.

"Then he went on, Mr. Carter, to assure me that you were wonderfully clever and brave and he said that I could depend entirely upon your judgment if you thought that anything was to be done.

"He told me a lot about you, for he wrote a really very long letter."

"I am much obliged to Patsy," said

Trim, "and now I understand how it is that you looked for me, for I have kept them informed in New York of my movements and when I found that I must come to San Antonio a few days ago I sent them a telegram saying so——"

"And Patsy telegraphed me," said Miss Walker, "telling me the day upon which you would arrive, so I came into the city and went around to the various hotels until I found where you were."

"I do hope you will help me!"

"You may be sure of that if it is in my power. Now let's have the story."

"I don't want to begin too far back," she said, "and yet you must understand that I am living with my uncle. Both my father and mother are dead."

"From my mother I inherited a little property that was placed in my uncle's hands to take care of. My sister's legacy was placed in the same way."

Miss Walker paused for a moment and Trim could see that she was holding back her tears. This was explained a moment later when she continued softly:

"My sister died about a year and a half ago. I have never been able to understand the cause of her death and I am anxious that you should take hold of this matter not only to help me but to clear up that painful mystery."

Trim bowed and as she remained silent he asked:

"What became of your sister's legacy after her death?"

"It remained," she answered, "in my uncle's charge and eventually will become my property if I should marry."

Again she hesitated and Trim said gravely:

"You must not hesitate to tell me everything, Miss Walker, for if you keep back any details or any suspicion even, it will make it the harder for me to accomplish anything."

As she still remained silent he continued:

"Your uncle is a man of frightfully violent temper and he has the strength of a giant which he doesn't hesitate to use upon anybody who offends him."

Miss Walker looked at him with amazement.

"Your uncle and I," said Trim, "have met although he doesn't know me."

"You surprise me greatly," she answered, "but you have described him exactly."

"I may as well tell you frankly that I have a dreadful fear that my uncle was in some way responsible for my sister's death."

"Our property was so placed that as long as we remained unmarried he had the management of it. If we should die unmarried it would all go to him."

"There's cause enough for crime in that," thought Trim, "especially when the man in the case is such a ruffian as Dr. Walker."

"Please go on," he said aloud.

"Did you always live in Texas?"

"Oh, no; we came here only a few years ago. My father and mother, as well as my uncle, had lived many years in Asia, particularly in India and China."

"My uncle had made a failure as a physician, and at the time of my mother's death, so far as I can learn, he was without practice or means."

"The little fortune that she bequeathed to my sister and myself must have saved him from absolute poverty."

"He returned to America with us and bought a ranch a few miles from San Antonio, and there we have lived since."

"So far as I know he has managed the property well, although I don't think that it has gained in value. What I mean is that I think nothing has been lost. There is just about enough income from it to enable us to live decently."

"My sister and I never had happiness while living with my uncle, for his temper was so savage that he made no friends and few people cared to come to see us because they disliked to meet him."

"What little enjoyment we had was got mainly at other ranches or at houses in town where once in a long time we went to visit."

"On one of these visits my sister met a young army officer; they fell in love with each other at once and became engaged."

"My uncle strangely enough made not the slightest objection to the engagement and arrangements were made for the marriage."

"The day had been set and but a few weeks before the event my sister died. I

suppose I had better tell you about that, for I fear the same fate for myself.

"To be perfectly frank, Mr. Carter, I was fortunate enough a short time ago to attract the interest of a young man, a clergyman who has a small parish, and he has offered me his hand.

"As with my sister my uncle has made no objection to the engagement, but something seems to tell me that if my uncle can prevent it the marriage will not take place."

While Miss Walker was saying this Trim was thinking hard.

"Of course he wouldn't let the girl get married," his thoughts ran, "for if she married that would take away half of the property that is now under his control and if this girl marries all the property will go to her.

"If she had had the luck to fall in love with a rich man the uncle might not put any obstacle in her way, but rather trust to her to let him keep the property; but as she wants to marry a poor clergyman it's certain enough that she will want what belongs to her.

"Therefore, as the only way to keep the property is by causing her death, he will try to bring that about. At least that's the way it seems to me now.

"Perhaps I shall think different when I have heard the circumstances of her sister's death."

"I suppose you will want to know all the details?" she resumed.

"Everything as exact as you can tell me," Trim answered.

"Very well. The house we live in is like very many of the houses in this part of the country, a large one-story structure.

"We use only a part of it at present and that part of it that you need to know about is a wing of the building in which my uncle's room is situated as well as the two occupied by my sister and myself.

"These three rooms are in a row, each one with a window that looks out upon a lawn. The rooms are entered by doors from a hallway that extends through the wing.

"On the other side of the hallway there are no rooms and it is lighted by very small windows."

"I understand," said Trim; "go on."

"The previous occupants of the house had had great trouble with Indians and lawless Mexicans. Accordingly they had placed bars before the windows of these rooms so that one might think the place was a prison; besides the bars there are heavy shutters on the inside.

"My sister's room was next to Dr. Walker's, that is, between the doctor's and my room.

"One night as she was about to retire she asked me if I had ever heard a whistling in the night; 'nothing but the wind,' I answered.

" 'Oh, I don't mean that,' she said; 'I mean human whistling.' I said no, and asked her what she meant. She shook her head doubtfully and said that possibly she had dreamed this, but that on several occasions she had been awakened suddenly as if by the sound of a whistle and she wondered what it meant.

"I thought that quite likely it might come from some of the Mexicans who are employed at the place and who live in huts at a little distance from the dwelling.

" 'Perhaps it was uncle calling to the baboon,' I suggested."

"The what?" asked Trim.

"I neglected to tell you," said Miss Walker, "although I don't suppose that it is important, that my uncle has two or three strange animals about the place that he brought or that was sent to him from Australia.

"One of these is a baboon, an ugly beast that roams about the place at perfect liberty; almost everybody is afraid of him and it is his presence there that keeps my few friends from calling on me quite as much as my uncle's terrible temper."

"What other animals are there there?" asked Trim carelessly.

"There is no other strange beast at the ranch now," she answered, "except a cheetah, but he is as harmless as a cat and gives nobody any trouble."

"Very well, go on."

"My sister responded that my uncle never called to the baboon or the cheetah either by a whistle, and then repeated her remark that probably she had dreamed of it.

"After that she said good-night and went into her room. I sat at my table

writing for quite a long time after that and I think she must have been in bed fully an hour when I heard a low whistle followed by an agonized scream which I at once recognized as coming from her.

"Of course I ran to my door and unlocked it——"

"Did you both keep your doors locked?" interrupted Trim.

"Yes, we never went into our rooms without locking our doors behind us."

"Why was that?"

"Because we were afraid of the baboon, who could open doors as readily as a human being."

"Oh, yes, I see—go on."

"I threw open my door and ran out into the hall, which as I have told you extended along one side of that wing. Just as I entered the hall my sister opened her door and I saw her standing there with a candle in her hand. Her face was ghastly pale.

"'What is it, dear?' I asked, running to her. 'The speckled band!' she gasped, and before I could reach her the candle dropped from her hand and went out, and she fell full length upon the floor."

Miss Walker paused, overcome for the moment by the memory of the terrible scene; when she resumed, she said:

"Just then my uncle came rushing out from his own room to see what was the matter.

"We picked my sister up and carried her to bed and my uncle found the candle which she had been holding and relighted it. He set it upon the table near her bed and went to work at once to restore her to consciousness.

"Did I tell you that he was a physician?"

"I think not, but I knew it."

"Very well, what I was going to say was that I think he really used every possible effort to restore her.

"It was in vain—it seemed that she had died instantly."

CHAPTER III.

DR. WALKER IN THE GAME.

"After my sister's death," continued Miss Walker presently, "matters at the house went on in their usual way, except that I was more lonely than ever, having

lost my one steady companion and seeing nobody else.

"My uncle's violent temper made it almost impossible for us to keep servants so that I did not have even such company as they might have given me.

"I preferred to look after the housework myself than to try to stand between them and his abuse.

"I always felt terribly depressed about my sister's death, not only because of losing her, but because of its very mysterious nature."

"Was nothing ever done about it?" asked Trim.

"Yes," she answered, "there was an official investigation. My uncle's temper was so notorious that the officers of the law were only too glad for an opportunity to punish him.

"He had already been the cause of the death of a Mexican employee, but he didn't suffer from it because nobody took the matter up to push it.

"I was very much opposed to an investigation of my sister's death and throughout it all I am sure that I did nothing or said nothing that could have angered my uncle.

"In fact, he himself took pains to tell me that he appreciated the care I took to say nothing against him when I was a witness before the coroner."

"What did the coroner's jury say?" asked Trim.

"Oh, something about the death having been due to causes unknown. My uncle was entirely freed from suspicion except so far as I myself have always been unable to understand the matter.

"Perhaps I ought not to suspect him, but now that my own marriage is approaching and I see how ugly he is, I tremble for myself without knowing quite why."

"No wonder," said Trim. "Now what has occurred, if anything, recently to arouse your fear?"

"About a week ago," answered Miss Walker, "my uncle took a sudden fancy for repairing the wall of my room.

"This was something very unusual for him to do, but of course I made no objection.

"The repairs made it necessary for me to occupy some other room, and partly at

his request and partly because there really was no other room suitable for me, I went into that which my sister had occupied.

"It had remained unused since her death.

"You can understand that I was very much depressed at sleeping there, but I said to myself that I ought not to feel uneasy and so I compelled myself to occupy the room.

"Now I will not say that anything has really happened to make me afraid.

"It may be that I have been suffering from an excited imagination, but I am certain that I was aroused from sleep the first night I stayed there by the sound of whistling."

"Ah!" said Trim, "now let's see; this must have been after you wrote to Patsy?"

"Yes. It was after I received my reply from him."

"Did your uncle bring you that letter?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything about it?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"He asked me who it was from."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said it was from a friend in New York."

"But you didn't say who?"

"Oh, no. He wanted me to tell him, but I wouldn't. Then he tried to take the letter from me.

"He would have done so, for he is fearfully strong, but I screamed and luckily at that moment there were several Mexicans passing who ran up when they heard the scream, and my uncle, either ashamed to display his temper before them or afraid of the consequences, let me go.

"I read the letter and afterward hid it where he would never find it."

"Was it after you received that letter that he began those repairs?"

"Yes."

"Does he know about the telegram that you received from Patsy?"

"I think not."

"Very well then, go on. What about this whistle?"

"I don't know. I was simply awakened by it, that is all I can say."

"Have you heard it more than once?"

"Yes. On four different nights. I heard it last night or rather very early this morning.

"It has frightened me more each time and if it had not been for the telegram that told of your being here it seems to me that I should have gone insane with anxiety."

"Nothing else has happened, however, has there?"

"No."

"Excuse me, Miss Walker, but I think there has."

She looked at him with amazement.

"I'm afraid you're not telling me everything," he said quietly.

"You suspect that your uncle killed your sister——"

"Oh, don't say it!" she exclaimed in great agitation. "I'm convinced that she must have died from simple fright."

"I don't believe it," retorted Trim; "permit me," and he leaned over and raised the edge of her sleeve.

Upon her wrist were five dark-blue spots.

"I just caught a glimpse of the edge of one of those spots," remarked Trim, "and I have reason to know that the doctor has a very powerful grip."

Miss Walker blushed.

"I don't think he realizes how strong he is," she said.

"Never mind about that," said Trim; "what was going on when he took hold of you so roughly as to leave those marks?"

"He was trying to make me tell him about that letter that Patsy wrote me."

"And you didn't tell him?"

"Not a word. I might as well have let him kill me then for not telling him as to tell him and then suffer from his insane temper."

"I see. Well, Miss Walker, I will do my best to help you."

"You really think then that I am in danger?"

"I don't want to frighten you, but I must say that I think it is well that you have found me at this time."

"Ah, what shall I do?"

"I will tell you in a moment. I'll have

to think first. It seems to me that this is about the darkest and most rascally matter that I ever had anything to do with."

Trim sat silent with his eyes closed for two or three minutes. At last he rose and said abruptly:

"Dr. Walker is in town to-day."

"What!" she exclaimed in evident alarm. "I left him at the ranch."

"Didn't he know that you were coming to town?"

"No. I supposed that he would stay at the ranch all day and I went away early on the pretense that I was going to visit some friends."

"He is in town just the same, for I have seen him. Should you think that he is likely to return to the ranch before nightfall?"

Miss Walker shook her head.

"When he comes to town," she answered, "he usually never comes back until evening."

"Then that will give me time to take a run out there and look at your sister's room. Will there be any difficulty about my getting into the house?"

"Not if I am there."

"You must be there, for I may want to ask you some questions. The thing for you to do now, Miss Walker, is to return at once to the ranch and be there when I arrive."

"I will certainly come out and I will tell you then what is necessary for you to do."

"You may be sure that if there is anything I can do to save you from your sister's fate, it shall be done."

"I only hope," said Miss Walker, "that my uncle will not see me while I am in San Antonio."

After this she said good-by to Trim and left the hotel.

The young fellow paced up and down his room for some time after her departure, thinking over the case.

The business that had brought him to San Antonio was his search for a Chinese named Ping who had been connected with a number of crimes that had taken place, some of them in New York and some in other parts of the country.

Ping was the leading member of a gang that operated in many different places.

Trim had arrived in America after

traveling around the world, just as Nick Carter was about to break up the New York gang.

In this matter Trim had had a share of the work and ever since he had been pursuing Ping and other members of the gang.

The last known of Ping he had left Spokane in the State of Washington for Tacoma.

Trim had followed him to Tacoma and there had succeeded in capturing Ping's chief partner.*

For some time after that Trim had looked in vain for any clew as to Ping's whereabouts; then he got word that led him to suspect that the Chinese had gone to Leavenworth, and when Trim arrived there he became satisfied that Ping had gone on to Texas and probably to San Antonio.

Step by step Trim had followed the Chinese without getting up with him until now, and at this moment he was as uncertain as to Ping's whereabouts as he had ever been.

"Even if I knew where Ping was at this minute," he thought, "I should be inclined to let him get away even at the risk of losing him again, because Miss Walker's case is so terribly important."

"That girl will be murdered as sure as a gun if I don't get my little work in right away, and it looks to me as if the doctor, who is a giant in strength, was also a giant in rascally methods."

"If I've got the right understanding of this case, he is by far the worst and ablest criminal that I ever had anything to do with."

Trim had got about as far as this in his thoughts when there was a thundering knock on the door.

"Come in," he said in a surprised tone.

The door was thrown open at once and there stood Dr. Walker. The big man stood in the doorway, riding whip in hand, glaring savagely at Trim.

"What the devil is your name?" he demanded after a moment.

"It's a pleasant day, Dr. Walker. Walk in," responded Trim quietly.

* An account of this may be found in "Trim Shoots the Grain Chute," in No. 14 of the New Nick Carter Library.

"You know my name then, do you, you impudent little clodhopper?" growled the doctor. "What is your name?"

"I don't think it's likely to rain to-day," answered Trim pleasantly.

"Don't you try to beat about the bush!" roared the doctor in a fearful rage.

"I want to know if your name is Carter?"

"Why didn't you ask me then?"

"Well, I do ask you, do you understand?" and the doctor added a long string of oaths to this.

"Oh, yes, my name's Carter," responded Trim dryly, "but I don't usually make such a fuss about it as you do."

"I'll teach you what fuss means. What have you been saying to my niece?"

"To your what?"

"My niece Edith has been here, I tell you, I traced her; I found the letter that one of your meddlesome fellows up in New York wrote to her and so I've learned that she, the ungrateful creature, had tried to set a detective on me.

"I watched her ever since. I knew she came here. After she started for home I made out that this was the room she came to, so here I am, and I tell you, young fellow, that I won't have any prying around my place or upon my actions.

"You may think you're pretty smart, but you'll find if you tackle me that I won't give you any chance to go further. Understand?"

"I am not sure that I do," answered Trim, "but I'm certain that I don't care to."

"You would defy me, would you?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't pay any attention to you."

Trim turned his back and walked slowly across the room, leaving the doctor standing there perfectly speechless for the moment with rage.

Presently Trim faced about and remarked coolly:

"You may sit down if you want to and make yourself entirely at home, but I'll suggest that it will be just as well if you don't talk so loud. The neighbors might not enjoy it."

"See here, you impudent kid!" hissed the doctor, "I tell you that I'm dead in

earnest in this. I'm not a comfortable man to deal with.

"I don't know what you have been saying to my niece and I don't care.

"I simply give you this warning that if you dare to set foot on my premises I won't give you the chance to learn either the truth or anything else. Understand?"

With this he stepped to the fireplace, took up the poker there and with a quick movement bent it until its ends almost met, then he threw it upon the floor and glared at Trim.

"I see," remarked Trim, picking up the bent poker, "you mean that you would twist me as you twisted this bit of iron?"

"Yes, that's about it."

"You have quite a good grip," remarked Trim, and as he said this he put his whole force into the task and bent the poker straight again.

He quietly leaned it up in the fireplace and remarked:

"I reckon it's just as useful now as it was before.

CHAPTER IV.

TRIM MEETS ACQUAINTANCES.

Dr. Walker stared at Trim in amazement. As he stared his anger grew, but for a moment he could not control his voice sufficiently to say anything. At last he hissed:

"You defy me, do you, you young snipper snapper!"

"Defy nothing!" retorted Trim indifferently. "I simply don't care anything about you. I shall mind my own business and it will be just as well if you would attend to yours."

"All right, all right!" exclaimed the doctor, going toward the door.

"I stand by what I have already said; I'll have no interference in my own affairs by you or any of your prying gang."

Trim made no response and the doctor went out banging the door hard behind him.

"He's a dangerous customer and no mistake," thought Trim.

"Under most circumstances I should say that a man of his kind makes it easier

for the detective by showing himself and threatening all sorts of things, but in Dr. Walker's case I have a suspicion that there's something more than the man's mere anger back of his calling on me.

"He has a violent temper, it is true, but why isn't it possible that he used his temper in this case to mask his wish to see just who I am and so find out what sort of a fellow he has got to deal with?"

"Beneath all those threats I'll bet that there is a foul purpose, for I believe Dr. Walker to be capable of the most horrible crimes."

Thinking thus Trim went to the window to watch Dr. Walker as he left the hotel.

He saw the tall man cross the street and stand there for a moment as if undecided which way to go.

"I'm on to you, old fellow," said Trim to himself suddenly. "You're wondering whether I'm going to shadow you. All right, I'll just do that same."

Standing behind a curtain through which he could dimly see the doctor's form, but which concealed himself completely, Trim made a rapid but thorough change in his appearance.

Just as the doctor started away with long strides, Trim hastily put on a coat that was very unlike the one he had been wearing, and ran down the stairs to the street door.

Dr. Walker at that moment was turning up a side street not far from the hotel.

Trim jumped on to a passing car, paid his fare and got off after riding one block.

This had enabled him to catch up with the doctor without attracting attention to himself by running.

When he left the car Dr. Walker was but a few paces distant. Trim saw him, but did not pay very much attention to him just then, for he saw something else that interested him much more.

A Chinese was standing in front of a building which the doctor was approaching.

Coming rapidly toward it from the opposite direction was a tall rough-looking man whom Trim instantly recognized.

It was Stormy Judson, a miner whom he had met in his previous investigations

when his pursuit of Ping took him to Leadville, as described in a previous number of this library.*

Trim did not recognize the Chinese because the Celestial stood with his face turned away.

The three, that is Dr. Walker, Stormy and the Chinese, came together just at the moment when Trim left the car and started toward them.

There was trouble at once.

Apparently without cause Stormy raised his fist and struck hard at the Chinese.

The latter dodged aside, thus escaping the blow and tried to enter the building before which he stood.

Stormy leaped after him and caught him by the blouse.

Dr. Walker, evidently greatly startled by this unexpected event, jumped after Stormy and laid hold of his shoulders.

It was clear that the doctor was exerting all his strength for Stormy was pulled away from the Chinese.

He turned about and hit the doctor in the chest a blow that caused him to stagger back a trifle.

The Chinese then being free for the instant whipped a knife from under his blouse and took one step toward the two white men, undoubtedly with the intention of plunging it into Stormy's heart.

It was all taking place much more quickly than can be described.

The moment that the Chinese turned to deliver what he meant to be a fatal blow, Trim recognized him.

It was the long-sought Ping.

The boy rushed forward at full speed, determined if possible to capture Ping then and there.

Ping, however, seemed to think better of his purpose, for after taking one step toward Stormy he suddenly concealed the knife beneath his blouse again and jumped into the doorway which appeared to be the entrance to an ordinary laundry.

Meantime Dr. Walker, recovering quickly from the blow that Stormy had given him, struck back so violently that Stormy staggered against the building, tumbling up against the door just as Ping was trying to shut it behind him.

Stormy got his foot on the threshold

and prevented the door from being shut while he faced about to give the doctor another taste of his fist.

The doctor, however, perhaps because he saw Trim running up, changed his tactics altogether.

It was not likely that he recognized Trim through the boy's disguise, but whether or not, he made a sign as if to show that he was disgusted with the row and walked rapidly on.

Stormy justified his nickname by swearing like a madman at both the doctor and the Chinese when Trim came up.

The young detective immediately gave up all idea of shadowing the doctor for the sake of making a desperate effort to capture Ping.

He threw his whole weight against the door which Stormy was preventing from being closed.

It cracked and trembled, but did not budge. It was held, although partly open, more firmly than if it had been closed and locked by iron bolts.

From within came the excited cries of several Chinese.

"Dod rot 'em!" roared Stormy, "just let me get in there and I'll clean out the whole shebang."

"I'll help you, Stormy," cried Trim; "keep your foot where it is, but lunge with your shoulders against the door."

"Hey?" shouted Stormy in great surprise, "er reckon I know thet voice!"

"So you do," answered Trim, "but say nothing."

After just one glance of pleasure, Stormy drew back and threw himself hard against the door, Trim at the same time making a lunge at it also.

Again it cracked and shivered, but failed to yield.

"Melican man stay out!"

"Police! police!"

"Robbers! Thieves!"

"Shoot them!"

These cries and many others in the Chinese language came from within the laundry, but for the moment not a head appeared in the slightly open doorway.

"Thar a-pushin' it so hard," cried Stormy, "thet they'll break me foot!"

"Give it one more try!" exclaimed Trim.

Just then the muzzle of a gun was thrust through the opening in the door.

Trim quickly brought his fist against it, knocking the muzzle up, and just as he did so his eyes were blinded by a flash and his ears rang with the report of the weapon.

The charge, which seemed heavy enough to have blown his head off if he had not turned the gun upward, went rushing over his head, carrying his hat with it.

The cries and the shot naturally attracted a good deal of attention in the neighborhood and men were beginning to run toward the spot.

The shot caused them to approach more cautiously and for that reason Stormy and Trim finally got into the laundry before any other persons had come to the scene.

Immediately after the gunshot they made another lunge at the door.

This time it cracked from top to bottom almost in the middle and one-half of the door fell in so that there was room to enter.

Trim leaped in with his revolver drawn and he would have used it if it had been necessary.

He saw what looked like an ordinary front room of a laundry.

There was a counter along one side and upon shelves back of it were bundles that looked like laundry work.

At the back was a door opening into another room where the washing was done. He also saw the contrivance by which the front door had been made so difficult to open.

It consisted simply of a long heavy beam that was attached to the further wall by a hinge.

When pushed straight up it would have rested against the wall with its top at the ceiling. Let down by swinging it on the hinge its further end would come against the front door.

When Ping had retreated into the laundry to escape Stormy, this big bar had been let down and if the door had been completely closed it would have held it fast much better than any ordinary combination of locks and bolts.

The fact that Stormy had got his foot between the threshold and the door itself,

prevented the bar from lowering as far as it would if the door had been completely closed.

The Chinese in the laundry had done their best to close the door, but not as Stormy had supposed by pushing against it.

They had caught hold of the long bar and hung their weight upon it and Stormy's foot would certainly have been crushed or pushed out of the way if it had not been that the soles of his boots were new, and consequently stiff and heavy.

Just as Trim entered the Chinese were dropping from the bar and making a rush for the rear room.

"Stop where you are!" he shouted.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he saw an earthen dish come flying straight toward him.

Quick as a flash he fired his revolver and the dish broke into many pieces and fell harmlessly to the floor.

"Murder the whole caboodle of 'em!" roared Stormy, entering after Trim.

The rough Westerner whipped out both of his revolvers and would have fired right and left into the little crowd of Chinese if Trim had not prevented him.

"Don't do that, Stormy," cried the boy; "it'll only make trouble for ourselves if we have unnecessary bloodshed. Come with me into the other room."

The effect of Trim's shot had been to startle the Chinese so that they gave up all further attempts at resistance.

Three or four of them were still in the front room. They slunk back against the walls trembling.

There were sounds of hurried movement in the room yonder. The door was closed, but Trim rushed forward and opened it without hesitation.

The second room, generally speaking, was like the back room of any laundry, but there was a trap door in the floor and just as Trim entered this door was closed with a slam.

There was nobody in the room. A pickaxe was leaning against the wall at one side.

"Look out for those fellows in the front room, Stormy," commanded Trim.

Stormy wheeled about in the doorway between the two rooms and covered the frightened Chinese with his revolvers.

Trim then laid hold of the pickaxe and crossed the room with a loud stamping until he came near the edge of the trap door; then, still stamping, he leaned forward and struck the trap door two or three not very hard blows with the pickaxe.

"What in thunder be ye doin' thet for?" asked Stormy, looking over his shoulder in surprise.

Trim did not answer and he did not need to.

From below came three or four pistol shots in rapid succession and the bullets went straight up through the trap door and buried themselves in the ceiling overhead.

The cause for Trim's act was then clear to Stormy.

The boy had suspected that the retreating Chinese would count on his running to the trap door, when they would try to kill him by firing through it.

He had run near it and then had pounded with the pickaxe to make them think that he was stepping directly upon it.

After the shots Trim fell full length upon the floor and gave a loud groan.

Stormy glanced at him anxiously. Trim winked.

The boy hoped that this ruse might persuade the Chinese below that he had been injured and that they would then raise the trap door.

It seemed that they were too sharp for him.

Lying with his ear close to the floor he could dimly hear the sound of retreating footsteps from somewhere below and it was certain therefore that after firing the shots the pigtailed rascals had retreated further.

CHAPTER V.

VALUABLE LAUNDRY BUNDLES.

The racket had created a great deal of excitement in the neighborhood and by the time that Trim was convinced that the Chinese below would not reopen the trap two or three policemen had run up and were entering the laundry.

Seeing Stormy standing with drawn revolvers in the middle doorway they promptly supposed that some rough

whites had undertaken to clean out the laundry for sport, and they would have put Stormy under arrest if it had not been for Trim.

He promptly made himself known to them and explained briefly the cause of the racket.

"So far as I am concerned," said Trim hurriedly, "I'm going to get that trap door open and chase up the one man in all the world that I want to capture; but I should advise you to make a pretty thorough investigation of this laundry."

"Why, what do you think of it?" asked one of the policemen.

Trim at the moment was kneeling on the trap door trying to find the secret spring or other contrivance by which it could be opened.

"No matter what I think," he replied, "this fellow Ping is a professional thief and wherever he goes you may be certain that he will put up jobs for the commission of crime.

"A blind man could see that this laundry is a fake."

"A fake?"

"Cert. It has not been open for business very long——"

"How did you know that?"

"From the looks of things of course. You see that bar by which the front door could be closed against investigation?"

"Yes."

"Never saw anything like that in an ordinary laundry, did you?"

"No, I never did."

"Well, it strikes me that this joint was put in order for the sake of making it a headquarters for criminals.

"It looks to me as if they hadn't got everything fully ready, but I'll bet they've begun business just the same."

"You really think so, do you?"

"Yes. Confound it! why can't I get this door open? Here they have prepared a way you see for getting out in a hurry and they had a means of keeping the door barred until they should have had time to escape.

"This trap door would not have been seen by ordinary eyes, and I might not have noticed it myself if I hadn't seen it falling as I came in.

"I'll have it open before long, though!"

Trim worked away and the policeman looked curiously about the room.

"This laundry has not been open for more than a few days for a fact," he muttered.

Then he turned to his companions and said:

"You'd better take the pigtales to the station house anyhow and have them examined."

"Why don't you examine the bundles of laundry on the shelves in the front room?" said Trim.

"Won't find anything but shirts and collars," responded the policeman.

"Well, perhaps you won't, but if I were you I'd look at them."

The policeman went out and opened the first bundle he came to. It proved to be a roll of silk. He hastily opened another and that contained valuable lace.

One after another of the bundles were opened and proved to be not merely goods left by customers for washing, but plunder taken by means of shoplifting from the various stores in San Antonio.

"Nothing like the Chinese for cleverness," remarked Trim, who was patiently cutting a hole in the floor with a pocket knife.

"No one would ever think of looking in a brown paper bundle on a laundryman's shelf for lace and silk. It was a safer place to hide their stuff than if they had put it in this underground passage."

"Well, this is a great discovery!" said the policeman. "Here for the past week or two the department has been worried by the complaint of storekeepers who have missed articles, and we have not been able to trace them a single step.

"This is a great haul!"

"And the biggest part of it," muttered Trim, "has got away."

"What are ye tryin' to do, youngster?" asked Stormy, who had taken no part in the proceedings after the arrival of the policemen.

"I've made up my mind by sounding," replied Trim, "that the catch that holds this door must be right under here somewhere.

"I don't know where the spring is that controls it, so the best way it seems to me would be to cut away the clasp itself.

"Ah! Here it is now, I guess."

As he said this he felt his knife blade scrape upon metal beneath the wood through which he was cutting.

"Yer reckon yer struck the right place, youngster?" asked Stormy interestedly.

"Yes, there is not much doubt of it."

"Well then, ef the police will 'low, supposin' I bombard the thing? What do ye think?"

"Good idea," said Trim.

"You've no objection, I suppose?" and he turned to the policemen as he rose to his feet.

"What do you want to do?"

"We want to blow this trap door open."

"Well, go ahead, I suppose——"

Stormy did not wait to know what the policeman supposed. He placed the muzzle of his revolver close to the floor and fired.

The bullet tore a little hole in the plank and then apparently pursued a course sideways.

"It struck metal sure as death," remarked Stormy and he fired again.

The second shot apparently did a good deal of damage, for when Trim put his finger into the hole made partly by his knife and partly by the bullets, he was able to stir the trap door so much that its edges in the floor could be seen.

Stormy fired again and the last shot smashed the contrivance that held the door in place.

They then lifted the door open and saw that below it was an empty chamber, the floor of which was not more than six feet beneath the floor of the laundry.

There were no steps leading down, but of course it was a simple enough matter to drop from one floor to another.

This Trim did without hesitation. He was sure that Ping and the Chinese who had accompanied him had long since left the neighborhood.

His judgment was correct in this matter and it will not be necessary to relate in detail how he and Stormy investigated the underground passage that the Chinese had prepared for their escape.

Everything showed them that the gang had but recently got to work.

The very fact of a pickaxe being in the laundry room was proof that they had no more than completed their underground passage.

"These fellows were just ready to begin good big business," remarked Trim as he let the rays of his pocket lamp light up the passage.

This passage was wide enough in places to allow for the storing of stolen goods to a considerable extent.

For the most part, however, it was so narrow that only one person could pass through at a time.

It ended in the cellar of a house upon another street. The entrance to the passage there was concealed by some loose boards leaning against the wall.

Stormy and Trim went all through this house and found that it was empty. There was not even any furniture in it, and pinned to the outside door was a card announcing that the place was to let.

"We'll have to interview the landlord about this," thought Trim.

The whole affair had taken but a very few minutes, and while it was going on Trim had forgotten about Dr. Walker.

On his way back to the laundry through the underground passage he remembered the doctor and regretted that things had so happened that both men in whom he was interested had got out of his sight.

"What brought ye yere, young feller?" asked Stormy, who was feeling his way along behind Trim.

"Ping," was the short response.

"Yer don't say so!"

"But I do, though, and he'll take me all over the world if he can get that far.

"I shall certainly keep after him until I have caught him, although that tall scoundrel that got mixed up in this affair at the start may delay me a bit here in San Antonio."

"Do yer mean thet big feller with the ridin' whip?"

"Yes."

"Well, he didn't git mixed up in it by any sort of accident."

"Didn't he?"

"Not much."

"How was it then? I thought it looked as if he just happened to be standing there or passing and was simply trying to get away."

This was not precisely Trim's thought on the matter, although it was perfectly true that he had not been able to see in the short sharp fight before the door,

that Dr. Walker was taking sides with Ping.

Now as he began to think it over, various things occurred to his mind to make him think that there might be some connection between the doctor and the Chinese, and what he said to Stormy was for the purpose of causing Stormy to tell fully what he knew.

"There weren't no accident in it," said Stormy. "It was jest this way. Ye know I tried to corner Ping when ye were in Leadville?"

"Yes, I remember."

"An' ye know how he took a fall out of me?"

"I haven't forgotten it."

"Well, neither have I. It hes jest made me riled ever since. To tell yer the truth, youngster, I've almost hoped thet ye wouldn't succeed in ketching Ping so thet I could get a chance some time if he ever crossed my way to git even with him.

"I thought to myself, thinks I, ef Trim Carter ketches Ping and puts him behind the bars the Chinese will stay thar for life mos' likely ef he isn't strung up on the gallows.

"Anyhow ef Trim ketches him thare'll be no way for me to get a swipe at him. So, thinks I, it will jest do me good ef the feller keeps out of Trim's clutches so thet I can run the chance of comin' across him somewhar.

"Of course yer know I didn't really much think thet I ever would come acrost him, but still es I was driftin' about the country I always kept my eyes open an' looked sharp at every Chinese thet came my way.

"I've thought two or three times thet I seen him."

"Were you mistaken?"

"Er reckon I must hev been by the fuss made about it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, for instance, up yere in Houston I seen a Chinese upon the street thet I thought was Ping an' I give him a biff on the jaw before I asked any questions.

"They fined me five dollars an' costs in the police court."

"And it wasn't Ping?" asked Trim with a laugh.

"Ping be derved. No it wasn't him nor any of his family."

"I should have thought that would have made you more cautious, Stormy?"

"Well, so it did in a way, but when I see this Chinese standin' right in front of me I couldn't mistake him.

"I knew it was him an' with a wish thet you was handy so's to git the advantage of the lickin' I expected to give him, I sailed in.

"I'd have done him up, too, an' no mistake ef it hadn't been for the interference of his pal."

"His pal, Stormy?"

"Yep, that's what I call him."

"You surely don't mean the tall man with the ridin' whip?"

"But I do though."

"You're sure he knew Ping are you?"

"Yer bet I am.

"In the first place what would any white man interfere for anyhow? It wasn't none of his business ef I had a little scrap with a pigtail."

"Some men might have thought that you had no right to hit the Chinese without cause," suggested Trim calmly.

"Thunderation! Ain't I had cause 'nough, but no matter. This big chap he caught a hold of me and Ping said something to him.

"I couldn't rightly make out the words, I think it was in Chinese; anyhow the big chap answered in Chinese, thet I'm sure of."

"Then that settles it," said Trim, "and you have given me the best piece of information I've had in the course of all this affair."

"Hev I done yer any good?" asked Stormy with great interest.

"You have indeed. I had just a little suspicion that the doctor might be another of Ping's confederates, but I had no proof of it until now."

"Well, youngster, I'm derved glad ef I've at last done yer some good."

"Now," continued Trim, as if talking to himself, "I can follow up Miss Walker's matter without feeling that I am getting off Ping's track, for if Ping is in it with the doctor it means that the catching of one is likely to bring the other in."

"What be yer drivin' at, youngster?"

asked Stormy. "Es thare a woman in the case?"

"It seems there is," replied Trim. "Let's get out of this and I'll tell you all about it."

They had come through the underground passage and were now standing in the cellar beneath the laundry.

They climbed up through the trap door and found that a policeman had been left in charge of the place while the prisoners were being taken to the station house.

Trim went himself at once to headquarters in order to give information to the police and to ask them to put men on the search for Ping and the other Chinese who had got away with him.

This the police were perfectly willing to do and Trim would have been very glad if they had succeeded in capturing the Chinese for he felt that he had enough to handle in attending to Dr. Walker.

"It isn't likely," he thought, "that the doctor recognized me as I ran up to join Stormy, but the fact that he and Ping are acquainted and that they are probably in the game together, shows all the more reason for his calling on me at the hotel."

"Ping must have told him all about me and from his finding Patsy's letter to Miss Edith, he must have made up his mind that I would sooner or later drop to his game."

"As I thought in the hotel, it was not mere anger on his part that led him to my room."

"He came there to size me up and there isn't any doubt that if I can get out to his ranch he will try to make his words good and settle me forever."

"It is also clear that I shall have to make my play quickly for all these events, including the breaking up of Ping's new game, will cause the doctor to hurry up his scheme to get possession of his niece's property."

"That can't be done without the murder of Miss Edith and whatever happens that has got to be prevented."

CHAPTER VI.

TRIM AT THE RANCH.

As Trim had every reason to trust Stormy and as he knew that the honest fellow was wild over detective work, he had no hesitation in telling him about Miss Walker's story.

"And yer goin' out to the ranch to do the old villain up, beant yer?" asked Stormy when the story was finished.

"I'm going to start at once," was Trim's reply.

"Is thare any reason why I couldn't go 'long?"

"Not a bit of it, if you're willing to take the risks."

"Risks?"

"Exactly. I think this is going to be one of the most dangerous jobs I have ever had."

"Then jest count me in it ef yer will, Trim."

"I shall be very glad to because I may want some help."

"Thar ain't no man in Texas big 'nough to frighten me."

"What if it wasn't a man who makes the thing dangerous?"

"Well, I don't believe in ghosts."

"No, of course not, but there are such things as animals, aren't there?"

Stormy looked at Trim in surprise.

"Yer don't think the doctor keeps lions an' tigers chained up thar to defend him, do yer?"

"No, but the young lady said something about a baboon."

Stormy looked scornful.

"It's all right," said Trim, "I may be mistaken of course, but I'm inclined to think that we shall find that the most dangerous thing we have to meet is something that isn't a man and not a baboon either."

"Whatever it is, young feller, I'm with yer an' I won't run for nothin'."

"Then let's get horses and proceed to the ranch as soon as we can."

It was early in the afternoon when, as Trim and Stormy were riding through a grove of cottonwood trees, they discovered Miss Edith Walker in the road before them.

They at once halted and as the young

lady recognized Trim, she came toward him.

"Has anything gone wrong, Miss Walker?" asked Trim.

"No," she answered. "On the contrary everything is, I think, just as you would wish it to be, but I came out to meet you here thinking that it would be best if you should not ride directly up to the ranch."

Trim did not wholly understand what she meant and waited for her to explain.

"You see," she said, "there are a number of Mexicans who are occasionally employed by my uncle and some of them are nearly always about the place."

"If they should see you ride up it is more than likely that they would tell my uncle about it when he returns home and he would then be put upon his guard."

"That is a wise thought, Miss Walker," said Trim, "but how shall we get to the house without attracting attention?"

"If you will get off your horse and come this way a moment I will show you," she answered, at the same time casting a hasty look toward Stormy.

Trim hastened to introduce them and to assure Miss Walker that she had nothing to fear from the rough-looking man who was the detective's companion.

She then conducted them to the edge of the grove from where they saw that the ranch was very near by.

"I often walk out here," she said, "in the middle of the day in order to get in the shade of the trees so that my coming here now will not attract any notice."

"You will see that the ranch buildings extend in one direction almost as far as this line of trees."

Trim looked as she indicated and observed that while there was a short stretch of open land between where he stood and the ranch, there was a point a little further away where a row of buildings came up almost to the edge of the grove.

"Now," she said, "the few men who are about the place now have taken advantage of my uncle's absence and at this time they are at a little distance from the ranch upon the other side of it."

"If you go down through this grove to the point where the trees are nearest to the buildings, you can then walk up to

the house, and by keeping close to the corral you will escape observation.

"If you should ride up you would certainly be seen."

"Very well then," said Trim, "we will hide our horses among the trees at some distance from the road and do as you say."

"I will return to the house openly," she continued, "and will wait for you at an open door."

After a moment's thought and a glance at the ranch buildings Trim led his horse away from the road until they were so far within the grove that even if the horses should stamp and neigh, they would be unlikely to attract attention from passers.

He put them far enough from the edge of the grove to make certain that they should not be observed, but so near it that he could eventually remain there if necessary and keep the house in view.

When this had been done and both horses were securely fastened, Trim and Stormy went back through the grove until they came to the point nearest to the ranch buildings, then they followed Miss Walker's directions and at length came to where she stood waiting for them in an open doorway.

"Now," said Trim, "let us go directly to your sister's room."

She led them along the hall which she had described with three rooms opening from one side of it, and opened the door of the middle room.

Trim went in and the first thing he did was to cross the room and look out through the window directly toward the cottonwood grove.

He saw to his satisfaction that the place where he had left his horses was in full view from the window, although the horses of course were not visible as they were too far within the line of trees.

He then threw himself into a chair and looked around the apartment.

What he saw was a plainly furnished, very ordinary chamber, with rather high walls.

"Is this room," he asked, "exactly as it was when your sister occupied it?"

"It is not changed in the least particular," Miss Walker answered.

Trim went to the window and made a hasty examination of the fastenings.

"No human being," he said, "could get in from the outside unless these iron bars can be stirred by some secret contrivance."

"Mr. Carter," said Miss Walker quietly, "I can see that you believe my poor sister was foully dealt with."

"I do believe it," responded Trim.

"And you suspect, naturally enough, that the guilty person came in through that window?"

"I don't necessarily suspect it, but I was looking to see if that might possibly be the way."

"You don't think it is, do you?"

"No, not now."

"I don't see how else it could have been done," said Miss Walker sadly.

"Perhaps," responded Trim, "that is because you do not fix your suspicions upon the right party?"

"You mean my uncle?" she exclaimed sharply.

Trim bowed.

"Well," she remarked presently, "why not? I've been thinking so to myself for a long time, why shouldn't we speak it out loud?"

"It isn't going to hurt your uncle any," said Trim, "to suspect him if he is innocent."

"We mean to find out the truth and therefore we must learn if it was possible for anybody to get into this room from outside."

"I don't think it was."

"But there was one thing," continued Trim, "that may mean a great deal."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you say that at the time your sister stood in the doorway just before she fell that she used some words about a band?"

"Yes. As I understood them she cried, 'the speckled band,' just before she fell."

"What do you think that meant?"

"I didn't think anything at the time, you know, and afterward when I spoke to my uncle about it we presumed that it might refer to a band of roving Mexicans who were at that time in this neighborhood."

"Are such bands about here very often?"

"Not often, but once in a while the

strangest, most lawless-looking men come here and actually camp near the house.

"My uncle treats them as friends and in fact they seem to be the only friends he has."

"They are probably Mexican outlaws," thought Trim, "who are banded together for the commission of robbery and other crimes and it would not surprise me if the doctor proved to be their leader."

Aloud he said:

"Did you ever know of any band of Mexicans calling themselves speckled?"

"No, I never did, but I wondered if it might not be possible that my sister had seen them with some of their peculiar cloths which might have been dotted or speckled. Possibly they had handkerchiefs of that kind."

"Don't you think there might have been something in that?"

"No, I don't," returned Trim abruptly, "but it was reasonable enough for you to think so."

"Then what do you think the speckled band meant?"

"I can't tell you yet, but I will see later."

Trim went again to the window and this time made a more thorough examination.

The result of it was that he was fully satisfied that no human being could enter there.

"Are you sure that the window was locked upon that night?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Miss Walker, "I went to raise it after we had laid my sister upon the bed, in order to admit more air. I found it locked."

"Then the murderer didn't come in that way. Are you sure about the door?"

"I am," replied Miss Walker. "I distinctly remember that I heard my sister turn the key in the lock after she entered her room."

"And is there no secret door between this room and the hall or any other room?"

"None that I ever heard of."

Trim then went around the sides of the room rapping gently upon the walls as he went.

The bed stood against the wall which

divided this room from the one occupied by Dr. Walker.

When Trim arrived there he looked in a surprised way at the floor for a moment and then at the ceiling just above him.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to a small hole in the wall just above the bed and an inch or two below the ceiling.

"That is for ventilation," answered Miss Edith.

"No murderer could hev gone through thet," remarked Stormy, who had been looking on with great interest.

"Er reckon a good-sized mouse would hev got stuck tryin' to get through thar."

"Think so?" responded Trim indifferently, who had his eyes fixed upon the ventilator.

There seemed to be nothing unusual about it. In many buildings he had seen little holes, cut just like that for the sake of ventilation, and there was no doubt whatever that as Stormy had said, the passage was too small for a large-sized mouse.

Trim got up on a chair and from that stepped upon the headboard of the bed and thus brought his eyes upon a level with the ventilator.

He could see through into the doctor's room.

"Funny," he remarked to himself, "that there should be a ventilator simply between two rooms.

"If they wanted to get fresh air in here why didn't they put the ventilator so that it would connect with the outside?"

He said nothing, however, and after a moment got down again.

"That ventilator," he remarked, "was not here when your uncle took the house."

"No," responded Miss Walker with a look of surprise, "my uncle had it cut through less than two years ago, but I didn't suppose it looked so new as that."

"It doesn't look particularly new," said Trim, "but I was quite certain the thing had been made recently. What is this for?"

At this question he laid his hand upon the tassel of a cord that was hanging from a point near the ventilator, so that it came down to the head of the bed.

A person lying in bed could easily have reached the tassel without rising.

"That's a bell pull," said Miss Walker, "that communicates with the kitchen."

Trim gave the cord a yank.

"I wouldn't do that," exclaimed Miss Walker, alarmed, "for the servant who is now in the kitchen might answer it and finding that you were here, might report the matter to my uncle."

"The servant won't answer it," responded Trim.

"What makes you think so?"

"I'll ask you first if this bell pull wasn't put up here at the time the ventilator was made."

"Yes, it was."

"And were both arranged previously to the death of your sister?"

"Yes."

Trim gave the cord another yank.

"I've a good mind to pull the thing down," he said, "but I reckon it will be better to leave it where it is."

"I don't understand you," said Miss Walker.

"Why, didn't you ever summon a servant by pulling it?"

"You must remember," she answered, "that I have occupied this room but a few nights and as the servants have a perfect terror of my uncle, they don't like to come near his room unless they have to; therefore when I want to get anything I go and get it myself, and that was my sister's way."

"I don't think that I ever pulled that bell or that she had."

"It wouldn't have done you any good if you had," remarked Trim.

"Why not?"

"Because it's a dummy."

"Do you mean that it is not attached to any bell?"

"That is exactly what I mean. That little iron rod that it is tied to above there is firm in the wall.

"The bell pull doesn't communicate with anything!"

"Why, I wonder what my uncle put it up for?"

"So do I. Let's look into his room." Full of wonder Miss Walker led the way to the doctor's room and Trim and Stormy followed her.

This room was very much like the

other, but it had a writing desk in it and an iron safe.

On top of the safe there was a saucer that looked as if it had had milk in it.

"The doctor is fond of cats, I see," remarked Trim, taking up the saucer.

"Oh, no, not at all, there isn't a cat about the place."

"But this saucer has had milk in it."

"So it has!"

"What other pet has he that drinks milk?"

Miss Edith looked hard at the saucer.

"I cannot think," she answered, "not the baboon, certainly."

"Well, hardly."

Trim set the saucer down and tried the door of the safe. It was locked.

"Ever see inside here?" he asked.

"Once only," responded Miss Walker.

"I came into this room unexpectedly and my uncle slammed the door hard the minute I entered.

"I merely had a glance inside."

"What was in it?"

"I saw nothing but books."

"What have you got there, Stormy?" asked Trim.

Stormy had picked up a strip of leather that looked something like a whiplash.

It lay upon the writing desk. One end was knotted in a slip noose.

"It's a whiplash, er reckon," responded Stormy, handing it to Trim, "but I don't see the rest of the whip lying 'round yere anywhar."

"No," said Trim, examining the slip knot carefully, "you won't find the rest of the whip. Put it back just as you found it, Stormy."

When this was done Trim got upon his knees before the chair that stood in front of the writing desk.

This desk was so placed against the wall that it was very near the bed in the adjoining room.

Trim examined the seat of the chair with a pocket microscope. He arose presently with a sigh of satisfaction.

"What hev yer found now, youngster?" asked Stormy.

"I have found," was the reply, "that Dr. Walker sometimes stands on this chair."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

"The doctor," Trim responded, "is a

very tall man. Is there anything in this room that he couldn't reach without getting on this chair?"

Stormy looked around him. Everything, bookshelves and all were within easy reach of a short man's arms.

"I don't see," said Stormy at last, "what he should stand on the chair for unless it was to wipe the ceiling."

"Perhaps that was it," said Trim.

"Now let's go into the other room."

They left the doctor's room just as they had found it and went down the hall to the one which had been occupied by Miss Edith until repairs were begun there.

Trim looked into it and remarked:

"It doesn't seem to need repairing very much."

"No," said Miss Walker, "I didn't see that anything ought to be done to it, but as my uncle was quite anxious about it, of course I made no objections."

"No wonder her uncle was anxious," thought Trim. "He wanted to compel the girl to sleep in the room next to his own."

"This room hasn't any ventilator," he remarked aloud.

"No," she answered, "none was ever cut through this."

"And it hasn't got any dummy bell pull."

"No."

"Well, I reckon I have seen all I want to."

Trim left the room and stood in the hallway in deep thought for a moment.

"Do you think, Mr. Carter, that you have seen——"

"I have seen no more than you have," he interrupted, "but possibly these things tell me a different story from what they tell you."

"Do you think, then, that you know how my poor sister came to her death?"

"I think so; and Miss Walker, I mean to save you from that same fate."

The girl was very pale but she kept control of herself and asked Trim what he intended to do.

"The room you used to occupy," he asked, "is not in very bad order; you could manage to sleep there to-night, couldn't you?"

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly,

"but my uncle would forbid it if he should know."

"He mustn't know. You must pretend to retire as you have during the past few nights in your sister's room, but after you know that the doctor himself has retired, or when he thinks that you are sound asleep, you must put your candle in the window."

"That will be a signal to me and I will at once come with my friend here and you must let us in."

"We will then pass the night in your sister's room and you will go to your own."

"If the doctor should hear you——" began Miss Walker.

"He will not hear me," interrupted Trim. "Of course it is a risky thing but it is the only way that I can see by which we can clear up the mystery of your sister's death and save you from one equally horrible."

"Horrible! Mr. Carter?"

"Yes. I don't know of anything more horrible than your sister's fate. If I should tell you now what I think it might unnerve you."

"You must be prepared, Miss Walker, for a very terrible discovery. Leave it to me and we will try to see that no further harm comes."

"I will do everything you say," she answered faintly.

"Very well then, you may have a troublesome time with your uncle when he returns from San Antonio for he called on me after you left but I am sure that he will do nothing worse than quarrel with you."

"He won't attempt any serious mischief until after nightfall and I am certain that you will be safe from him if you do what I have told you."

After repeating his instructions carefully about the placing of the candle in the window, etc., Trim and Stormy left the house by the way they had come.

Creeping cautiously along by the corral and the grove they returned to the spot where their horses were tied.

There they sat down upon the ground to wait for night, as Trim was convinced that there was nothing that could be done until that time.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPECKLED BAND.

For a long time Trim sat silent. His brows were wrinkled and Stormy seeing that he was in deep thought, was too respectful to ask questions.

At length Trim said:

"Stormy, did you notice anything peculiar about that bed?"

"Do you mean the one in the girl's room?"

"Yes."

"No, it seemed just like a plain, ordinary bed."

"Exactly, but didn't you look at the floor?"

"Yes," and Stormy tried to remember if he had seen anything peculiar about the floor.

He could remember nothing and presently Trim remarked:

"It seemed to me rather odd that the bed should have been fastened to the floor."

"Was it so?"

"Yes, there were clamps spiked to the posts and the floor also."

"By gum! what was that for?"

"Why it was to prevent anybody from moving the bed, of course."

"But why shouldn't they want the bed moved?"

"In order to make the work of murder easier."

Stormy stared but Trim went to thinking again and gave the honest fellow no satisfaction.

"Say," demanded Stormy at last, "ain't yer goin' ter tell a feller anythin' about this?"

"I am going to show you, if you have the nerve to go with me to-night," was the response, "but I don't like to talk about it until I know just how I am going to proceed."

"I am confident that I know now how the doctor proceeds but up to this minute I am stumped as to how I shall beat him."

"I have been thinking over some of the strange murders that had occurred in New York before Nick Carter and the rest of us got on to the track of this gang."

"There were men found with peculiar marks upon their necks but there was

nothing to show very clearly just how they had been killed.*

"I have been thinking," continued Trim, "that this fellow, the doctor, who has lived in China and who is evidently a confederate of Ping's, may have learned from Ping just how to carry on this cold-blooded operation and that possibly if we knew all the facts we should understand just how those murders were committed in New York, but that is not so much matter as to know how to prevent this one."

"Yer goin' ter hev the girl sneak into the other room, ain't yer?" asked Stormy.

"Yes, but you and I are going to be in her room."

"An' ye think thet thar's danger thet the doctor may do us up?"

"Why shouldn't be? he has succeeded with others, we are only men and what will kill one person is likely to kill us, isn't it?"

"Er reckon thet's so. But say, Trim, be ye gettin' scary?"

"No, no, don't think that. The only thing is I am really puzzled to see just how to play my game, for the doctor has a card up his sleeve that takes all the trumps.

"By jimminy! I've got it!"

Trim suddenly sat bolt upright and looked at his companion with glowing eyes.

"Hev ye found a way, boy?"

"I have. Look here, Stormy. Do you remember that a mile or two back on the road we passed a creek that had some willow trees growing beside it?"

"Er reckon er remember thet."

"Well then, I want a couple of willow twigs, rather strong ones, mind, and about four or five feet long."

"Wouldn't a stick of a cottonwood tree do just as well?"

"No, I want something that will bend and not break, like willow."

"I'll go and git you a couple."

"I wish you would, for I don't think that both of us should leave this place at the same time and even if you go alone you must take great care not to be observed.

"There is no telling at what time Dr. Walker will return from San Antonio and if he saw you and recognized you he might suspect something."

"I'll take care thet he doesn't see me, Trim. But won't you tell me what you want the willow twigs for?"

"Later, Stormy."

"All right then," and off Stormy went to fetch the willows.

He returned with a couple of twigs after an hour or two and for several minutes Trim amused himself by hitting a tree with them.

They seemed to be just what he wanted, strong and limber.

"I reckon," he said at length, "that you'd better have your guns ready, Stormy, and I'll use the willows myself."

This was all the satisfaction that Stormy could get, for Trim stubbornly refused to answer questions. So they passed the time as best they could until after nightfall.

They saw the doctor ride up to the ranch and disappear within the building.

Once they distinguished the tones of his voice. He was evidently speaking in a terrible rage to somebody.

They also saw several Mexicans come idly up to the ranch and go to various buildings. They were probably the doctor's employees, or as Trim thought likely his confederates in crime.

It was a tiresome wait, but the end came at length when a light appeared in the middle window of the wing occupied by the doctor and his niece.

Trim and Stormy after making certain that their horses were safe, hurried through the grove and made their way as they had in the daylight to the door where they found Miss Walker awaiting them.

They exchanged no words. The girl herself seemed to feel that the detective had arranged his programme perfectly and that there was nothing to do but to follow it carefully.

Not a board creaked as they went on tiptoe past the doctor's room and entered the chamber where Miss Edith was supposed to be sleeping. She herself passed on into the next room.

Trim closed the door and cautiously turned the key. Then he went across the

* See "Trim Changes Cars," in No. 12 of the New Nick Carter Library.

room and felt of the window fastenings. They were in order.

The room was in total darkness but there was a faint spot of light upon the wall by the ventilator showing that a lamp or candle was burning low in the doctor's room.

Trim felt his way in the dark to Stormy and making a funnel with his hands whispered in Stormy's ear:

"Sit down and don't stir. Have your guns ready but don't fire until I say so."

Stormy silently obeyed and Trim, carrying the willow twigs with him, went to the bed and sat upon that. Then the minutes dragged by more slowly than they had during the long wait in the cottonwood grove.

Out there the two men had been able to converse and swap stories; here they hardly dared breathe for fear of betraying their presence to the scoundrel in the next room.

Both were highly excited. Trim because he felt certain of what would happen, and Stormy because he had been unable to make even the wildest guess at the manner of crime that the young detective had evidently discovered.

Perhaps half an hour had passed, although to the silent watchers it seemed much longer, when they heard the faint sound of a footfall in the doctor's room. Then there was a light creaking noise and Trim knew that the doctor was opening his iron safe.

For a minute or two after that no sound could be distinguished. Stormy's hands were dripping with perspiration as he gripped the revolvers and longed to use them.

The wildest kind of an uproar would have pleased him better than this fearful silence.

Trim had his teeth shut hard together as he sat on the edge of the bed with a willow stick in each hand.

Again there was a sound of movement in the doctor's room but just what the man was doing it was impossible to tell.

Trim waited.

"If I strike," he thought, "before the right moment I shall spoil everything and when the moment comes if I don't strike right it will be good-by to Trim."

There was another faint creaking noise,

but this time Trim was sure that it was not caused by the rusty hinges of the iron safe. It sounded more like the squeaking of leather boots.

"The doctor is getting up on his chair," thought the boy.

He half rose from the bed, and if Stormy could have seen anything he would have seen that Trim had his arm drawn back ready to strike the bare wall in front of him.

There was another moment of intense silence, during which it seemed to both men as if their hearts would burst with excitement. Then both heard a low but distinct hissing near the top of the room on the side where the bed stood.

This hissing had no more than begun when there was a blinding flash of light.

Trim had dropped one of the willow twigs and opened the slide of his lamp.

He directed his rays upon the wall where the dummy bell pull hung and at the same instant began to lash at the bell pull furiously with his willow stick.

Stormy sprang to his feet eager and anxious to take a hand in whatever was going on, but his eyes were so blinded by the sudden light that he could distinguish nothing except the frantic movements of the boy as he struck repeatedly with might and main at what appeared to be a swinging cord.

The instant the blows of the stick began to beat upon the wall both men heard a low whistle two or three times repeated from the adjoining room.

"The girl never dreamed that whistle," muttered Trim, between clinched teeth as he continued to pound furiously.

"Give me a shot at something!" exclaimed Stormy under his breath.

"What in thunder——"

His excited question was interrupted by a horrifying shriek from within the doctor's room.

It seemed as if the man, for it evidently was a man, who uttered it was in extreme agony and fear.

"Quick, Stormy," cried Trim, "unlock the door and go into the doctor's room! Break down the door if necessary!"

"Shall I shoot him?" demanded

Stormy, leaping across the room and turning the key.

In his excitement Trim had overturned his lamp so that now it lay on its side and its rays were no longer directed toward the wall.

"I don't think you'll need to shoot," he responded, reaching across the bed for the lamp, "but do as you think best."

He caught up the lamp while Stormy was running through the hall and directed its rays toward the ventilator.

There was nothing in sight except the dummy bell pull which was swaying back and forth.

He then started toward the hall after Stormy and as he heard Miss Walker moving in her own room, he called out:

"Don't be alarmed, young lady, we shall have this matter settled in a moment."

When he got into the hall Stormy, who had found the doctor's door locked, was just bursting it in by throwing himself against it.

Both entered the room together therefore, and the sight they saw was enough to chill their hearts.

Seated before his desk was the tall form of Dr. Walker, his head thrown back upon his chair, his eyes staring, his mouth wide open, his face ghastly pale and his hands tightly pinching the chair arms.

Around his forehead was a speckled band.

"Heavens and earth!" gasped Stormy.

"Stand in the doorway," Trim interrupted coldly, "and don't let Miss Walker in!"

Stormy stepped back and braced himself in the doorway, but he could not keep his eyes from the speckled band.

Trim drew a revolver and walked slowly across the room toward the doctor.

He picked up the whipcord that lay upon the desk, carefully held the slip noose until it came close down to the doctor's forehead.

As he did so the speckled band moved slowly and a serpent's head protruded from the coil.

Trim slipped the end over the horrible head and pulled the cord quickly.

"It is an Indian spotted adder," he remarked in a low tone, "the most dangerous snake that lives!"

Caught by the noose the snake slowly uncoiled itself from the doctor's brow, and Trim holding the dangerous reptile at arm's length, tossed it into the iron safe and closed the door.

"The doctor is dead and perhaps it is just as well that he came to his end in this way as to wait for the hangman," he remarked.

"Was it the snake that did the business?" asked Stormy in an awestruck whisper.

"Yes. You see that saucer? It's full of milk now. Snakes are as fond of milk as kittens are.

"But let's get out of here and take the best means we can of letting Miss Walker know the dreadful facts; so far as she is concerned my investigation is over, but I've got to find Ping and before I leave this house I must see if there is any clew to his presence here."

"But I don't half see through this part of the game yet," remarked Stormy.

"Come into the next room then, and I'll explain it to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

ALMOST CRUSHED TO DEATH.

Stormy went at once into the room where they had had their exciting watch, while Trim stepped to Miss Edith's door to tell her in a few words that her uncle had met his end by the means that he had intended for her.

He did not go into the details at all, but advised her to rest easy and leave it to him to notify the authorities and take all steps necessary.

As she seemed to be self possessed he joined Stormy, and placing his lamp so that it lighted the room, he made perfectly clear what had happened.

"That snake," he said, "kills almost instantly by its bite. The mark made by the bite is so small that it could hardly be seen on the skin even under microscope.

"The poison it throws into the system is of such a nature that no chemist can analyze it, therefore the criminal who used such a snake has got an almost sure

method of committing crime without detection, provided he has the means of keeping his snake out of view.

"That is just what the doctor looked out for here. The ventilator was built of course simply to permit the snake to crawl through and that dummy bell pull was hung for the purpose of making something down which the snake could glide to the bed.

"Now the doctor might put the snake up to that hole and start him through, but he could not compel the snake to bite, especially as the reptile was rather tame; so the doctor had to take chances.

"He could set the snake into this room knowing perfectly well that if the person sleeping in the bed should accidentally turn or in some other way disturb the reptile that a bite would follow and cause death at once.

"It was quite likely, however, and as I can see it did happen, that the snake would come into this room, stay a while and commit no injury whatever.

"That explained the doctor's whistle. He had the snake trained to obey that whistle.

"The doctor would let the snake remain in here for a while and then call him back and the reptile knew from that signal that he was about to be fed.

"Now you can understand why I was puzzled as to just how to get at this.

"Even if I had taken legal means for opening the doctor's safe and had found the snake there, I would have had no proof that the reptile was used for a criminal purpose.

"I had got to fix things in such a way that the snake would be sent in here and the danger was that the reptile excited by us might poison us both.

"I didn't dare to risk shooting him, for such creatures have a long life and their poison might have got scattered in every direction; so I thought of these willow twigs."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Stormy, "but you took long chances, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, there was some risk in it, for there was no telling but that the snake might spring from the ventilator right at me.

"That was why I thrashed the wall so hard, hoping to break his back.

"What I did was to drive him back through the ventilator. Then his master, suddenly aware that something troublesome had happened, probably was too hasty in trying to get control of the snake again.

"At all events the reptile turned upon his master and finished his career at once."

"It certainly beats anythin' I ever heerd of," remarked Stormy with a long breath.

"Same here, but it doesn't show us where Ping is."

"Yer can't git him out of yer head, can yer?"

"No, and I shan't until I have got him in my hands.

"Let's go back into the doctor's room a minute, or if you have any objection you can stay here and I'll go."

"I'll go anywhar ye will, lad."

They returned to the doctor's room, but they did not need to remain there long.

Lying open upon the desk where the doctor had been working on it, was a memorandum book showing that he himself had been the real leader of the gang with which Ping had been at work throughout the country.

All the others, several of whom had been imprisoned already, were merely confederates.

This man, Dr. Walker, had remained in the out-of-the-way ranch, directing things and having no hand in the criminal work excepting as he managed a band of lawless Mexicans whose operations were mainly in the way of horse stealing.

The memorandum book showed how the doctor had received reports from the many branches of the organization and on one page and another Trim found remarks about himself.

It all showed that while Ping was the most active leader in the gang the doctor was the unseen chief.

It had evidently been the intention to arrange an organization that should plunder all the principal cities in the country.

Broken up in one place and another

and most of the members of the gang imprisoned, the two leaders had finally decided to start a new gang in San Antonio.

Trim had arrived just as they had begun their work and had exposed and broken up their headquarters as has already been described.

It was quite doubtful now that the doctor was dead, whether Ping would be able to organize another gang, but that was no reason, as Trim thought, why the pursuit of the Chinese should be abandoned.

The boy put the memorandum book in his pocket and after advising Miss Walker to remain where she was until she should be aroused by San Antonio officers whom Trim intended to send out to the ranch, he and Stormy left the house.

They had barely stepped out upon the lawn when both were nearly knocked over by something that bounded from beside a shrub and tried to twine its arms around them.

"Durn the Greaser!" cried Stormy savagely.

Trim jumped aside, knowing that this was not a Mexican or even a human being, but the doctor's savage pet baboon.

"Don't let him hug you to death, Stormy," cried Trim, half laughing.

Stormy had no intention of being injured by this creature and before Trim could get to his assistance he had fired a bullet that made an end of the baboon at once.

The shot aroused the Mexicans who were about the place and Trim heard them hurrying toward the spot.

To Stormy's surprise the boy did not remain to meet the Mexicans; on the contrary he seized Stormy by the sleeve and hurried him off toward the cottonwood grove.

They reached it before any of the Mexicans discovered where they were, unfastened their horses, leaped into the saddle and sped toward San Antonio.

On the way Trim explained.

"There was no sense in having a fight with them," he said, "we might possibly have beaten them, but we couldn't have captured them.

"They will think we were a couple of

thieves and although they may discover before morning that the doctor is dead, it isn't at all likely that they will leave the place for they have no reason to suspect that a detective has been here.

"We'll let the sheriff attend to them."

The sheriff did attend to them.

Warned by Trim he sent a large body of men out to the ranch with the result that every one of the lawless Mexicans that had been led by the doctor was arrested.

Trim meantime devoted his attention wholly to Ping.

The police informed him that Ping had undoubtedly left San Antonio for the North.

After leaving the empty house at the further end of the underground passage Ping and the Chinese with him, of whom there seemed to be two, had scattered in different directions to meet again at the railway station, where within an hour after the racket in the supposed laundry they had all boarded a train.

The police had learned as much of this very late in the day and telegraphed orders up the line to have the train searched and the Chinamen arrested.

This had been done at a point some three hundred miles from San Antonio, but before the train reached there the Chinese had left it.

It looked, therefore, as if Trim were in for another long run after the shrewd Celestial, but he was not discouraged, for since this investigation began he had been met with the same difficulty and each time had managed to find a clew to Ping's movements.

This time it proved to be easier than it had before for upon a careful study of the memorandum book he found what seemed to be a plan for the reassembling of the gang's leaders at some point on the Canadian border.

It looked as if this plan had been arranged for use in case of anything happening such as had happened, that is, the complete breaking up of all operations.

Just where the criminals were to gather was not stated in the plan, but there were several references in it to the lakes.

"Now then," thought Trim, "Ping

isn't the only one of the original gang who is still at liberty.

"Nick sailed for England after one of them, my father intended certainly to go to Brazil after another, and Patsy chased still another off toward Canada.

"Whether those three have been caught yet I don't know, but I think not. Now it is altogether likely that every one of them knew of this plan.

"Therefore, I should say that it was reasonable that all of them were drifting toward the same point now and as they don't know that I have had anything to do with Dr. Walker it strikes me as possible that I may be able to corral them."

He studied the plan again and again and finally decided that of all places along the Canadian border the one most likely to answer to the description hinted at in the memorandum book was Detroit.

Accordingly he took the first train that he could get after coming to this conclusion and two or three days later found himself in Michigan's chief city.

It was a rather discouraging prospect. To begin with he was not certain that Ping was in the city, and if he were it was like looking for a needle in a haystack to find him.

Nevertheless, the only thing he could do was to hunt and this he did by assuming one after another a number of different disguises and visiting every Chinese laundry that he could find.

In each laundry he left a small parcel of clothing. His hope of course was to find some sight or trace of Ping among his countrymen.

After three days had passed he had been in every laundry and every Chinese shop in Detroit, and as yet had not found the first thing to throw any light on his search.

He was beginning to think that he would have to try elsewhere and was wondering whether some town near Niagara Falls or along the St. Lawrence, or even along the northwestern border ought to be tried when the end of the whole matter came in such a hurry that it nearly took his breath away.

He was walking slowly along the street when he suddenly came face to face with a man whom he knew.

This man's name was Murdock. He was one of the gang broken up by Nick Carter and Trim in New York in the beginning of the investigation.

Patsy had left New York on the chase after this man and as it proved later had followed him over a considerable part of this country and Canada much as Trim had followed Ping.

Murdock had managed somehow to escape capture up to this point.

Trim was so astonished at meeting him that he stopped abruptly but immediately walked on, hoping that Murdock had not noticed his surprise.

It will be remembered by those who have become familiar with this great case that although Trim had seen Murdock in New York the latter had not seen Trim, at least not to know him as a detective.

Trim hoped, therefore, that Murdock would not notice his start of surprise.

Perhaps Murdock did not. At all events he walked on as if nothing had happened, and of course Trim managed to keep him in view.

"If Murdock is here," thought Trim, "then Ping is, or it's a thousand chances to one he will be soon and if I keep Murdock in view I will some time or other come across Ping."

Murdock walked clear around the block, pausing at last upon the very spot where Trim had first seen him.

Trim at that moment was out of sight in a doorway.

"He's on to me," thought the boy, "and he has walked around this block simply to make out if he has been shadowed; probably he wonders who I am, but of course he suspects that anybody who looks twice at him must be a detective."

"Well, he's got to go somewhere; now we'll see where it is."

After a moment Murdock started on and this time instead of going around the block he went down the street toward the river.

Trim suspected what he was up to at once. Just across the river is Canadian territory and once over there the criminal would have a better chance of escaping arrest than he would have if he remained on American soil.

"It won't do to let that fellow get away," thought Trim. "Of course I could catch him after a while even in Canada, but I should have more trouble about it, for he would claim the protection of the laws over there."

"If he makes for a boat I shall certainly grab him."

It was clearly Murdock's intention to cross the river to the foreign country, for he went into a ferry house, paid his fare and went out to the open dock.

There was no boat in at that time but one was just approaching from the other side of the river.

Its forward deck was crowded with passengers. On the Detroit side there was also a small crowd of waiting passengers.

Murdock mingled with them and Trim could see that he was constantly looking over his shoulder as if to find out whether he were observed.

Passengers were prevented from going down to the very edge of the dock by a chain stretched across the roadway.

Trim kept as well as he could in the background, knowing that Murdock might try to escape by joining the passengers who came off the boat and thus returning into the city.

"I'll stop him, if he tries that," was the boy's thought. "And if he goes on to the boat I'll follow him and have him there."

As he was watching, Trim saw a Chinese enter the ferry house and join the waiting crowd.

It was not Ping, but the sight of the Celestial caused the boy to be more alert than ever.

He could not remember that he had ever seen this particular Chinese before but he was interested in him because the Celestial went straight up to Murdock and began to talk to him.

"This is getting interesting," thought Trim.

It was still more interesting when Murdock turned and pointed toward the spot where Trim was standing.

"They're on to me for good," he said to himself, "and if that's the case I might as well nail them right now, rather than risk their getting away."

Accordingly he started forward at a rapid walk.

Murdock and the Chinese seeing him, promptly jumped over the chain and ran down the dock toward the approaching boat.

One or two ferry employees called to them to come back but they paid no attention.

Trim also leaped over the chain and ran after them.

The ferry employees followed and a number of waiting passengers seeing that something exciting was going on, went over the chain too.

Trim caught up with Murdock and the Chinese at the very edge of the dock. They were trying to make their way around to the next dock by clinging to the piles and stepping across.

He caught hold of Murdock and pulled him back. Murdock turned upon him savagely and tried to beat him off.

Trim kept his grip and pulled the fellow away from the pile.

The Chinese meantime had taken fright and had run back among the passengers who were crowding down to see what was the matter.

This Chinese, who later proved to be one of the San Antonio gang, was stopped by a couple of passengers who had the sense to see that he was wanted by law officers.

Meantime Trim was having a sharp struggle with Murdock, who was fighting desperately to beat him off.

Of a sudden there was a warning cry from the oncoming ferry boat which was now entering the slip.

Trim felt that he would master his man in a moment longer and was already feeling triumphant by his capture when he felt a terrific blow upon his head and strong hands forcing his grip away from Murdock.

He staggered under the force of the blow and as he half turned he saw that his assailant was Ping, who had come rushing through the crowd to the rescue of his confederate.

Trim clutched out at Ping, but the Chinese was beyond his reach. Then the boy's foot caught a ring bolt in the floor of the dock and he lost his balance.

He was about to fall to his knees when

Ping, seeing the situation, leaped forward and gave him a sudden push that sent him off the edge of the dock.

At that instant the ferry boat was just about to make a landing and a hoarse cry went up from the excited spectators.

They supposed that Trim would be crushed between the boat and the dock. His only chance for safety seemed to be that he might fall into the water and by some good fortune cling to a pile or get under the overhang of the boat and thus save a crushing.

Trim did not reach the water.

A passenger standing in front of those on the ferry boat had leaped over the chain at the moment when Ping came through the crowd and attacked the young detective.

This passenger stooped quickly over the edge of the boat, caught Trim as he was falling by the shoulders and brought him upon the deck.

It was none other than Nick Carter himself.

The next instant the big boat bumped against the dock.

"That was a close call, young fellow," cried Nick cheerfully.

"Yes," replied Trim hurriedly, "but there are our men and we must have them."

He leaped from his rescuer's hands back to the dock and made for Ping and Murdock, who were trying to force their way back through the crowd.

Nick followed him and the capture of the two desperate criminals was made with little further difficulty.

It proved that Nick himself had a prisoner on the boat who belonged to the gang. That was Donovan, who had led the great detective a chase across the ocean and back again.

Before the day was over Patsy turned up in Detroit expecting to find a trace of Murdock there and he was not at all displeased to discover that his young partner in the business had already made the capture.

"This is a pretty successful round-up for you, Trim," remarked Nick, after the four prisoners had been placed behind the bars.

"There's one other Chinese," Trim remarked thoughtfully. "I'm thinking of

the fellow that came up from San Antonio with Ping. Ah! there he is now."

They were standing on the steps of police headquarters and Trim saw a Chinese passing who glanced in a frightened way at the building, evidently thinking of his confederates, whom he probably knew had all been captured and hoping in some way to aid them.

He recognized the face, having caught just a glimpse of it during the racket in the supposed laundry in San Antonio.

The boy darted down the steps, collared the Celestial and after a short struggle led him triumphantly into the building.

This capture completed the great case. All the leaders in the gang were either dead or in charge at last, and Trim, Nick and Patsy looked forward with satisfaction to taking up some other work.

There was plenty of it waiting for them and the next case of importance in which Trim was concerned may be found described in "Trim's String of Clews All Tied by the Same Knot," in No. 16 of the New Nick Carter Library.

[THE END.]

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